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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LISBON 001743

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TAGS: MARR MOPS PREL LE PO

SUBJECT: PORTUGAL READY TO CONTRIBUTE TO UNIFIL MISSION,  
AWAITING DETAILS

REF: A. STATE 134133

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Classified By: Classified by A/Pol/Econ Chief Cari Enav for Reasons 1.4  
(a)(b) and (d).

Summary:

11. (C) UNIFIL's mandate, still under discussion, will determine the type and size of Portugal's contribution to the force. Portugal has the political will to participate, with Prime Minister Socrates and his cabinet awaiting clarification of the mandate before deciding on its force's composition. At the working level, there is skepticism that UNIFIL will be able to implement UNSCR 1701 and concern about Lebanon's ability to support the mission. Absent further information, the Portuguese military is preparing to contribute a company or a company plus, or perhaps provide a Frigate. End Summary

12. (C) Ricardo Pracana, the MFA Chief of Cabinet for the Director General of Foreign Policy, told the Charge d'Affaires that Prime Minister Socrates and the relevant ministers would directly determine the country's contribution to UNIFIL and were awaiting UN clarification of its mandate. In a separate conversation with to A/Pol/Econ Chief, MFA Middle East Desk Officer Fernando Brito underscored Portugal's desire to support the UN effort and reiterated that UNIFIL's mandate, specifically the terms of reference, overall operational concepts, and the rules of engagement would determine Portugal's contribution.

13. (C) Brito commented that it was critical for UNIFIL's mandate to enable it to implement UNSCR 1701. UNIFIL forces would need to be able to confront Hezbollah and/or confiscate Hezbollah rocket launchers and weapons. If not, the almost eight-fold increase in manpower would be a waste. In a year's time, he added, if nothing had changed on the ground, it would be difficult to sell continued participation in UNIFIL's mission to the European public.

14. (C) Brito said Portugal had many other concerns about Lebanon's ability to keep the peace. He expressed doubts on the efficiency of the Lebanese Army and concern with regard to the many Shiite soldiers who identified with Hezbollah. For example, if UNIFIL forces did confiscate Hezbollah rocket launchers and handed them over to the Lebanese Army, would the Army turn around and return them to Hezbollah? Furthermore, Brito asserted that Lebanese President Siniora's recent statements also raised concerns about who had more clout within Lebanon - Siniora or Nasrallah??

15. (C) Given the poor implementation of previous UN

resolutions on Lebanon, Brito was not optimistic about the success of UNIFIL's ability to fulfill its mandate, whatever it may be. However, Portugal was going to do its part to bring all parties to the table to resolve the issues diplomatically. Brito noted that the EU had taken the observer seat in the Middle East for too long. The time had come for Europe and in particular, Portugal, in the run-up to its EU Presidency in the latter half of 2007 to play a greater role.

¶ 6. (C) With regard to logistics, Brito confirmed that Portugal supported France taking the UNIFIL lead, especially given its experience in the region. Portugal also supported the participation of Muslim troops, e.g. from Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc. but commented that it would be a challenge to ensure that some troops did not favor Hezbollah. He did not envy UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Alain Pelligrini who would likely have to micromanage the troops to ensure uniform implementation.

¶ 7. (C) Separately, Lieutenant General David de Almeida Oliveira, Chief of Joint Staff Operations, told Defense Attaché, that absent further information and given Portugal's limited resources, Portugal would likely deploy either a company (150 troops) or a company plus (250 troops) or in turn a frigate. There were neither funds nor equipment to support a larger force. (Ref B)

¶ 7. (C) Comment: Portugal wants to increase its profile on the global stage, especially in the run-up to its EU Presidency. Tired of sitting on the sidelines for too long, Portugal wants to use its good relations with Arab countries to play a greater role in the Middle East and is putting its

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money where its mouth is - not an easy task for this financially strapped nation whose forces are already stretched thin in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Congo and East Timor. In addition to contributing to UNIFIL, FM Amado will be traveling to Libya, Egypt and Jordan the week on August 21 to discuss events in the region. (Septel)

O'Neal